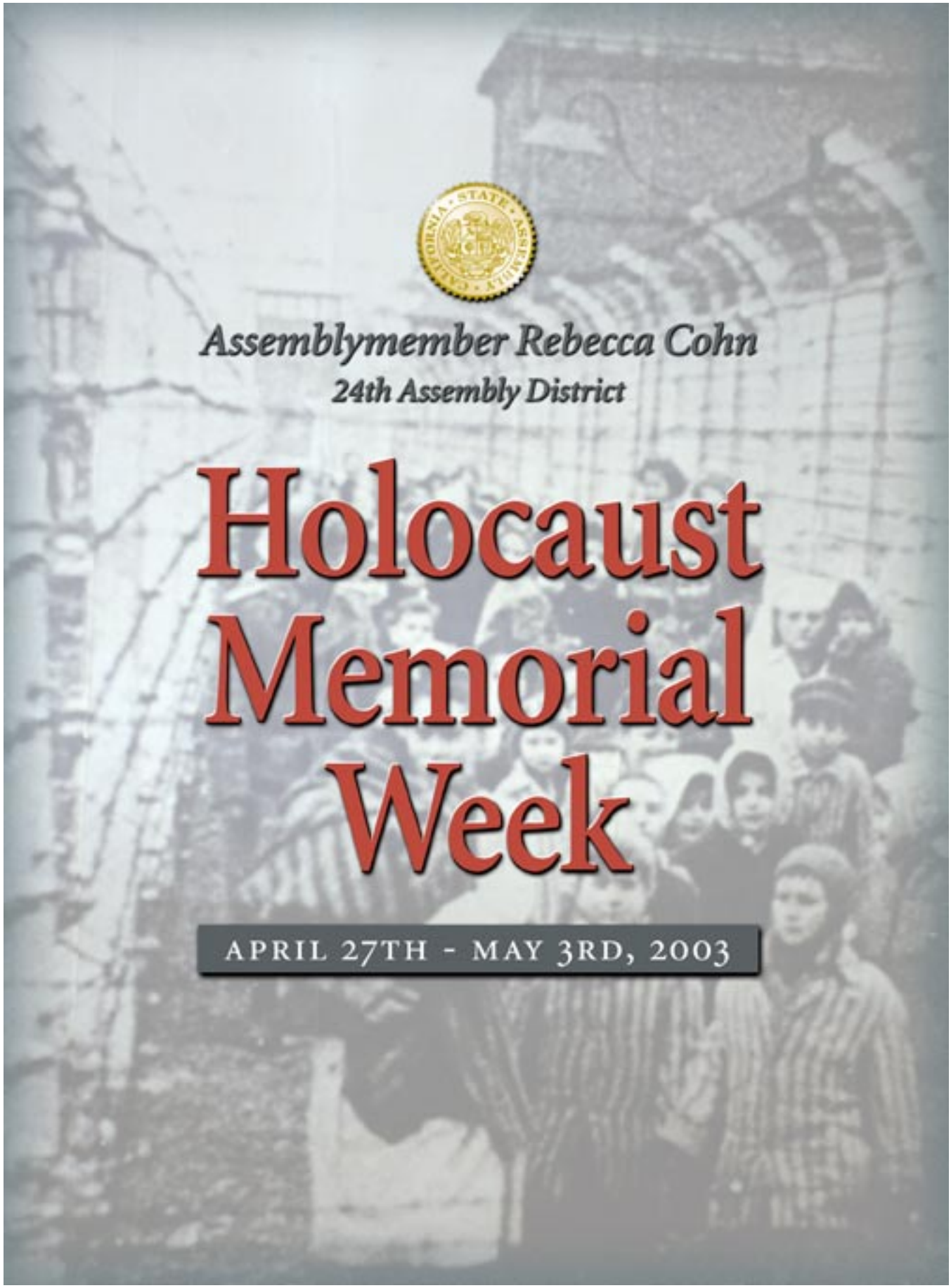

Assemblymember Rebecca Cohn

24th Assembly District

Holocaust Memorial Week

APRIL 27TH - MAY 3RD, 2003

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CHAIR, Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Committee on Appropriations
Committee on Education
Committee on Governmental Organization
Committee on Health
Committee on Veterans Affairs

April 26, 2003

Dear Friend:

I am proud to present a unique project from the 24th Assembly District in honor of 2003 California Holocaust Memorial Week. Please take a few moments to review and reflect upon the true-life stories that make up this booklet.

I have asked Holocaust survivors in my District to submit written accounts of their experiences. Their stories have been collected in this booklet to serve both as a reminder and as an archive. It is vital that we do our utmost to preserve these stories today, as there are fewer and fewer first-hand accounts lasting from year to year.

Some survivors were incapable or did not feel comfortable writing their own stories. I am proud to say that several high school student volunteers from my District took the time to sit, listen, and transcribe these stories. This sharing of stories from one generation to the next is what this project is all about.

As an Assemblymember, I feel it is one of my duties to ensure that the realities of the Holocaust's horrors are never forgotten, so that they may never be repeated.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Cohn

Rebecca Cohn
Assemblymember, 24th District

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Alex

During the winter of 1944/45 I was a prisoner in the Mittergars Concentration Camp in Southern Germany. The camp was one of several workcamps within the Dachau Concentration Camp complex, located near the village of Mittergars about forty miles east of Munich.

Conditions were very difficult in the camp. One could escape the brutality of the commandant and of the SS-guards unless one was unlucky enough to be singled out by them for special punishment with the flimsiest pretext. What none of the prisoners -- with the exception of the capos -- could escape however, was the lack of adequate clothing against the bitter cold and, perhaps even more painful, the lack of food. Being a Hungarian Jew, I was deported to the main camp at Dachau rather late in the war, in October of 1944, and was in good physical condition at the time. But by the time I was transferred from the workcamp at Muhldorf to Mittergars, sometime in December, I was -- like the other prisoners -- a skin-and-bone "walking skeleton". The constant pain of hunger was the worst of the various pains we had to endure.

No survivor can have, I believe, any "happy memories" from concentration camps, but I recall an incident from those dark days, which -- for a brief time at least -- eased my pain a little and restored to some degree, at that time of dire need, my faith in humanity. A German farmer, with his farm on the other side of the town from the camp, apparently requested the camp authorities to send some prisoners to work on his farm. I was lucky enough to be included in this work commando once, for a period of about two weeks. At the morning apell (roll call) a capo counted out fifteen prisoners, as I recall, and with an SS-guard at the rear of the group and the capo at the head we marched through the village of Mittergars to the farm. When we arrived at his place, the farmer took the SS-guard into the house and kept him there, probably supplying him with liquour and cigarettes, I guess. When we were out of the guard's sight the farmer's wife took our group into a shed and she, with some of her helpers, gave us food. It was some cooked vegetable, I believe, and a piece of bread. And this happened every day

while I was in the commando and most likely before and after also. This was an extraordinary experience for us and a very dangerous act on the part of the farmer and his wife. German civilians were forbidden to have any contact with the prisoners, and giving them extra food was an act for which the camp authorities surely would have severely punished them. By this act, I believe, they literally risked their freedom and perhaps even their lives.

This experience happened to me at the very lowest point in my life, when I felt totally surrounded by evil and abandoned by the whole world outside the camp. It helped me to maintain my will to survive, and it shows, even today, that individuals of decency and courage can make a difference in the fight against evil.

Alicia

The same dream returned tonight.

It was 1942. The war was raging all over Europe and death was a permanent visitor in Buczacz. His emissaries were the German Gestapo and the SS. This very morning we found out that they were going to attack the Ghetto and kill as many of us as they could find.

My mother woke me up and told me to dress and get ready to climb into our bunker -- the hiding place we built under our house. Suddenly I came fully awake with the realization that my sick friend Rachel, her sister Bella and her two children were new in the Ghetto and hadn't had the time to build a hiding place. I kissed my mother and my little brother Herzl and ran all the way to Rachel's house. I had a moment of panic when I saw the door open, thinking that I was too late and the Gestapo had taken them away. Then Bella appeared carrying Rachel in her arms. Her two-year-old daughter Hanna'le was holding onto Bella's skirt with one hand. The other was held by her eight-year-old brother.

A picture of desperation, I thought, as I lifted Hanna'le into my arms. We started running to get over the Bashte hill before the Gestapo and Ukrainian police surrounded the Ghetto. Our lives depended on speed, but running was causing me terrible pains in my chest. I ignored them and hugged Hann'le tightly as we ran down the hill to the river bank, over the bridge and into the old flour mill. We were just reaching the door when we heard gun shots, crying and loud shots coming clearly from the Bashte near the Jewish cemetery. It continued all through the day. We sat on the floor in frozen terror. Bella was holding both hands. Danny put his head in my lap and I put my hand over his exposed ear trying to block out the horrors which were all around us. Rachel sat with her knees up to her chin, periodically coughing into a white handkerchief which she kept over her mouth.

Finally toward the evening the shooting stopped.

“Children, I am going to find out if the Action is over,” Bella said. “I will return soon,” and, turning to Rachel, she handed her a small bundle. “Rachel, you know what to do if…..”

“And you, Alicia, keep an eye on the children.” When she called my name, I suddenly jumped up.

“No, Bella, I will go and see; you must stay here with your family,” and not waiting for her consent, I quickly ran out of the mill.

The moon was shining brightly and I had no difficulty in getting to the top of the Bashte. I looked around and saw a big mound of earth and then I heard a cry coming out from within it. The cries continued as I came closer and closer….and suddenly someone was shaking me.

“Wake up, Alicia, you are having the nightmare again.” It was only a dream, I realized as I came fully awake. Then why did I hear that cry coming from outside, that same pitiful cry I remembered hearing at the mound on the Bashte? How was that possible?

I could see clearly now that I was in my room in Mikvah, Israel. My friend Sarah, who woke me up, was sitting on a nearby chair, and I could see my other two roommates asleep in their beds. Yet in some strange way the nightmare was still with me. Someone outside was crying out as though in pain. I had to see who was crying. An Action…flashed through my mind as I dressed with trembling hands. Not here; not in Israel. I had to see my friend Anna; maybe she would be able to explain.

When I entered Anna’s room she was sitting up in her bed as though she was expecting me.

“I heard you cry out tonight again, Alicia,” she said softly as she motioned me to come nearer. “Would you like to talk about it?”

“Anna, we must go and look outside. Can’t you hear that pitiful crying? There is someone wounded outside calling for help. Will you come with me?”

It was cold outside and I shivered as the wet branches of the orange trees touched my face and my hands. Anna was walking in front of me, carrying her first-aid box in one hand and using the other to part the orange branches. Once in a while a soft thud sounded as an orange fell from its branch. We followed the crying voice. My heart was beating violently as I remembered the other time, when I followed a crying voice to what I could see was a mass grave. I had dug with my bare hands into the soft soil. A boy nine or ten years old rolled out of the earth, let out a small pitiful cry, like a drowned kitten, and lay still.

I mustn’t be too late, not this time….

And suddenly we came out of the orchard. In front of us was a huge hill of decomposed garbage. On top of the hill, silhouetted against the star-studded sky, stood a coyote. He lifted his head and let out one long agonized cry.

Isaac

I was the seventh of eight children born to David and Reizl Gildstein in Knyszen, Poland. My family moved to Bialystok when I was eight. My father owned a restaurant, a bakery, a grocery and delicatessen. My mother and older sisters helped in the businesses. My mother was a beautiful, gentle, caring person and everyone loved her. Every child was special to her.

My family was strongly Zionist, fueled by the anti-Semitism of the Poles. It wasn't safe for a Jew to go to public school, walk in the parks or mingle with the Poles. The Germans invaded Poland in 1939, killing, kidnapping, extorting and deporting many of us to concentration camps in Germany. A week later, we felt relieved and safe when Germany partitioned Poland between itself and the USSR. We lived under Soviet rule for almost 2 years, until Germany invaded Russia. Communism didn't seem so bad compared to the one week German occupation. However, private businesses were confiscated - everyone was put on a level playing field of poverty.

The Germans reinvaded us with a vengeance in 1941. The first 2000 Jews they rounded up were locked in the Bialysotker synagogue which was then set on fire. There were no survivors. With assistance of the local population, all remaining Jews were identified and forced into the ghetto.

While most of the family worked inside the ghetto making German uniforms, I worked outside to rebuild a nearby highway. To work outside the ghetto was to be at the mercy of cruel civilian foremen. However, the advantage was that you could barter clothes for food, then smuggle it by the guards, which was the only way the residents of the ghetto got any sustenance from the outside.

On February 5, 1943, the Germans decided to relocate 10,000 of us to a different location -

Treblinka. My father hid us in the attic but remained downstairs when the Nazis entered our home looking for us. He said we'd already gone to work or were already taken away. They took him away. Had he hidden with us, they'd probably have searched the house and found us all. I never saw him again.

On August 15, 1943, the Germans decided to liquidate the ghetto and announced that we were all being resettled. When they entered the ghetto they were met with fierce resistance from the Jewish underground, who were overrun and murdered on the spot when they ran out of ammunition.

We were packed tightly into cattle cars. It was very hot and we were all very thirsty. I will never forget how our fellow Polish citizens sold bottles of water to us for gold. When the train began moving, we forced the doors open and several people began to jump out only to be shot into pieces by machine gun fire from guards sitting on top of the cars. We arrived in Treblinka, but only women and children were allowed to disembark. I later found out that there had been an uprising the day before and some of the ovens had been destroyed. I was in Majdanek, a brutal death camp manned by Ukrainians until I volunteered to work as a machinist in a labor camp in Blyszyn, Poland. As the Russian army moved close to our camp, we were transported to Birkenau, a part of the Auschwitz extermination complex. I was selected to labor in a camp at Buna where IG Farben extracted gas and made chemicals from coal. We marched four miles, passing the crematoria and were herded into locked showers. We were relieved when the water began to flow - we knew about the gas "showers."

After three months in Auschwitz, I became angry at God. Why did we have to be the "chosen people" - looking forward to a piece of bread, a little soup and waiting to be murdered? There was no formula for survival - just luck. The lucky event that saved my life was reuniting with my best friend who collected and distributed uniforms at Buna. He gave me bread that was left in clothes of those who had died, and when it was time for the death march in the middle of winter near the end of the war, he gave me a pair of shoes that saved my feet and my life. It was possible to escape, but there was nowhere to hide - my countrymen had turned on the

Jews and collaborated with the Germans.

The allies bombed Buna several times but did not bomb the killing factory just down the road at Auschwitz. I will never forget, understand, or forgive the heads of state for having no desire to save us when it was so possible to do so….shame on them!

Of the ten thousand who began, only a few hundred survived the march to the Dora camp in Nordhausen, Germany, where the Germans built the rockets that bombed London. I remotely operated a wagon loaded with rocks from the excavation of a mountain where the V1 and V2 rockets were to be stored. My car accidentally derailed and I was sentenced to hanging for "committing sabotage." They only hung prisoners one day a week, and as I nervously waited for my destiny, the allies bombed this strategic target!

We were marched to a small seaport, Najsctadt Holstein, on the North Sea. The Germans (lying) told us the war was over and that we were to be transported to Sweden by boat. I was crammed into a former luxury boat, the Hamburg, that the Germans had turned into a floating concentration camp and renamed Cap Arcona. A Capo forced me to switch ships. I took his place on an old merchant ship and was lowered into its belly, which was full of human waste and dead bodies. The stench and the wailing of those suffering was more than I could bear. I lost all hope and was now ready to die. On May 3, 1945, the British bombed and sank the Cap Arcona. In minutes, over 8,000 inmates drowned. The Capo inadvertently saved my life!

Many of the survivors on the merchant ship got sick from overeating; their bodies couldn't digest "normal food" and they died on the day of their liberation, May 3, 1945.

I spent the next four years visiting Displaced Persons camps, looking for my friends and relatives. I was reunited with some good friends from my town, but my entire family had perished. I met Rochelle in Bergen Belsen. We emigrated to the US in 1949 and were married on January 29, 1950.

I was a machinist and shop inspector for Harnischfeger Corporation, Chicago. I retired in 1984 after 35 years of service, and we moved to California in 1987. We have 2 wonderful children, Mark in Chicago and Roslyn in San Jose, who have blessed us with 4 grandchildren.

I survived by luck, but my parents and seven siblings did not. Why me and not them? I, like most survivors, will always have these deeply painful guilt feelings. I still remember so vividly when survival seemed so hopeless, my mother praying and asking God, "Will some of my children survive to continue our heritage, or will there not be a trace of us?"

Lydia

Lydia's story is unique because her father was Jewish and her mother was Christian. She believes she and her family were spared primarily for this reason.

Lydia was born in 1932 in a small village in Germany where her parents and grandparents worked as tailors. Lydia's paternal grandmother enforced the rules of Kashrut and the family was observant; thus, Lydia was raised Jewish. In 1938, Lydia and her family moved to Mainz, a larger city in Germany, so their Jewish affiliation was less well known. She lived in a Jewish owned apartment building with her parents and Jewish grandmother.

In Germany, unlike other countries such as Hungary, the Nazis took freedoms and luxuries away gradually. The severest restrictions began to be enforced after Kristallnacht in 1938. The synagogue where Lydia attended school was burned down. That night was especially terrifying for six-year old Lydia because the SS came to destroy the apartment of a wealthy Jewish family who lived next door. Lydia and her grandmother waited nervously to see whether the men would come for them next. They poked their heads out into the hall to see what was happening and the SS men yelled at them to stay in their apartment. Luckily, the SS did not come to Lydia's apartment and they were temporarily safe.

Since Lydia's father was not allowed to hold a job, his wife secured a job and he worked for her illegally. When Jews were made to wear the yellow star, Lydia's mother got a falsified birth certificate that did not include Lydia's Jewish middle name "Sarah." Without this indicator, their family could claim that they had not raised Lydia as a Jew, thus making theirs a "Privileged Mixed Marriage." This entitled them to leave home without wearing the yellow star, and it made their lives a lot easier.

In 1942, when most of the deportations started in Germany, Lydia's grandmother received notification of her own impending deportation to Theresienstadt. Lydia's father never got over the guilt he felt when he was forced to deliver his mother to an almost certain death.

Her grandmother was sent to Terezin, where she died of starvation. After her grandmother's departure, Lydia's Jewish education and observance ended.

In 1943, all the Jews of mixed marriages were deported to labor camps. After initially working in a glass factory, Lydia's father worked as a tailor in the labor camp. His skill as a tailor possibly saved him from being deported to a death camp. For reasons unknown to Lydia, her father was returned home in 1944. Lydia believes that a revolt in Berlin by non-Jewish women with Jewish husbands led to her father's release.

After a bombing raid left the city in chaos, Lydia's mother obtained false papers and was able to get her family out of Mainz. They hid in the homes Catholic farmers who were family friends. When the farmers were notified that they had to give up their room to house Nazi soldiers, Lydia's family escaped on bicycle to the village where her non-Jewish relatives lived. They hid with them until the Americans liberated the country. The total amount of time they spent in hiding was only a few months but the psychological strain of wondering if they would be caught was long lasting.

Lydia and her family immigrated to the United States in 1946 as displaced persons because Germany had revoked their citizenship. They only had $40 with them when they arrived. Her parents worked very hard, enabling them to leave the slums of New York City and move onto a comfortable life. Lydia married and had three children. Once her children grew up and moved out, she went to college and eventually taught elementary for twenty years. She is a member of two local Holocaust survivor groups.

Interviewed by:
Leah and Ronny

Agnes

Agnes was born in 1924 in Carei, Romania a part of Transylvania that returned to Hungarian sovereignty in September 1940. In 1942 her family moved from Carei to Budapest in search of relief from state sponsored anti-Semitism and better economic opportunities.

The Germans occupied Budapest on March 19, 1944 and immediately instituted harsh racial laws. Jews were required to wear the yellow star, to live in special houses marked with the Star of David, and could only leave their homes between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Agnes, her parents and brother moved into a five-room apartment with a single kitchen and bathroom that they shared with four other families, one family per room. It was so cramped that her 17-year old brother slept in the bathtub. Later that spring he was deported to Bór, a harsh labor camp in Yugoslavia.

On October 15, 1944 the Arrowhead paramilitary took control of Budapest and ordered all Jewish women under age 45 to labor camps. Agnes and her cousin marched for three days before they reached their destination, Szentendre, where they were forced to dig trenches to stop enemy tanks. The Arrowhead soldiers terrorized the women and robbed them of all their possessions. Two weeks later, however, the Hungarian army took charge of the camp. The commander, like Agnes, was from Transylvania. He facilitated her escape by permitting her to escort a group of sick laborers to the Jewish hospital in Budapest. Meanwhile, Agnes' father was sent to Kis Tarcsa, a labor camp outside the city.

Upon her return to Budapest, Agnes learned that several foreign embassies were giving schutzpasses (safe passes) to Hungarian Jews. These schutzpasses allowed Jews to move from the "Jewish homes," where they faced constant risk of deportation, to protected houses near the embassies. She stood in line with thousands of other Jews and managed to obtain three passes, one for herself and each of her parents.

In November 1944, as the German and Hungarian military situation deteriorated, the Nazis

began to deport the Jewish inhabitants from these protected houses. When they lined up the residents of Agnes' house, a Hungarian policeman allowed Agnes and her mother to hide. They stood behind the door of the toilet in the basement for two freezing days and nights until it was safe to emerge.

Agnes knew it was only a matter of time before the Germans returned. Luckily, she met an old friend who worked as a courier for the Swiss embassy. He offered Agnes and her mother refuge there if they could find a way to escape their guarded building. The chaos of a bombing raid one night provided the opportunity, and the pair fled with just their toothbrushes and one attaché case.

Agnes and her mother moved into the Glass House on Vadász Utca, an annex of the Swiss embassy owned by Arthur Weiss. There they joined 3500 other refugees and waited out the war. The residents were densely packed and the toilet facilities were inadequate for such a large number of people. Agnes and her mother subsisted on ersatz coffee, a little bread and some thin soup each day, but were grateful to be relatively safe.

In the meantime, the Germans began to deport the men from her father's labor camp to Austria. Raoul Wallenberg saved many of these men, including Agnes' father, by claiming they were under the protection of the Swedish embassy. He organized a convoy of trucks that took the men from the Austrian border back to the Budapest Ghetto.

Agnes desperately tried to bring her father to Glass House. She obtained identity papers from members of the Zionist resistance who, at great personal risk, forged and delivered false documents to many Budapest Jews. Dressed in a peasant's babushka, and carrying identification papers that indicated she was Catholic, Agnes walked hours to the Jewish Hospital on the outskirts of the ghetto. Before leaving the Glass House she rehearsed Catholic prayers so she could prove her identity if stopped on the street. She planned to have her cousin, who worked at the hospital, summon her father for a blood test. But her father refused to cooperate. Agnes was only able to talk briefly to him through a hole in the ghetto

wall. He later told her that he was afraid to leave the ghetto for fear he might jeopardize her life if they were caught on the street together.

On December 31, 1944, the Germans and Arrowheads invaded the Glass House and ordered all the residents onto the street facing the Danube River. The German intention was clear; the river was already red with Jewish blood. Arthur Weiss managed to telephone the Swiss ambassador, Dr. Charles Lutz, to warn him of the attack. Dr. Lutz alerted the Budapest police and Hungarian army, who forced the Germans to allow the Jews to return to Glass House. The only casualty that day was Arthur Weiss who lost his life while saving the Jews under his protection. Agnes and her mother stayed in the basement of Glass House until January 18, 1945, when the Russians occupied Pest.

On that day Agnes and her mother walked to the ghetto to find Agnes' father. He was ill and weak, but the three of them made their way back to their original apartment. Agnes' brother returned home the following month. The family eventually returned to Carei, where her parents helped organize relief services for the Jewish community. There, Agnes met her husband, Joseph, who started a lumber business. They had two sons. The family left Romania in 1962 and moved to Detroit, Michigan, where they joined cousins who had settled there shortly after the war.

Agnes knows she was luckier than many. She spent most of the war with her mother, and all members of her immediate family survived. When Agnes reflects on those difficult times, she remembers the brave people who helped so many Budapest Jews survive. She is grateful to the Hungarian commander who allowed her to escape the labor camp, and to the Hungarian policeman who saved her from deportation. She honors the memory of Dr. Charles Lutz, Arthur Weiss, and Raoul Wallenberg, who protected so many Jews with their schutzpasses, the latter two at the cost of their own lives.

Interviewed by:
Bettina

Chaja

Chaja was born on March 20, 1920 in Kishiniv, Bessarabia, a province of Romania. Her parents were itinerant actors who traveled from one performance to another by sled, and she was born backstage. Although the family had little money Chaja enjoyed the travel because it exposed her to a rich culture. Because her family traveled so much she attended a variety of schools and never felt she had a real home. But she always felt that she belonged to a certain acting culture. By age 11 Chaja herself began to perform, and at 12 she served as a prompter. Fluent in seven languages, she spoke Yiddish at home. Her parents were not observant Jews, although they had grown up in religious families. However, her mother would light the Shabbat candles while traveling on the trains to new stage productions. Chaja recalls that Romania was very anti-Semitic. When the actors performed in Yiddish a person would stand guard to make sure no one would report them to the authorities. When a spy was spotted, the actors switched to Romanian.

In 1940, the Russians invaded Romania. The following year, on June 22, 1941, the Germans bombarded the town of Kishiniv. Many towns were on fire, all of the Jews were forced from their jobs, and life became very hard. Chaja and her family, along with the other actors and their families, were rounded up and herded onto crowded trains bound for the Ukraine. 120 people were squeezed into one car. Chaja and her mother were separated from her father and forced to labor in the fields barefoot. There was no place to sleep, conditions were unsanitary, and people began to go crazy. Many, mostly men, committed suicide. Chaja and her mother contracted malaria. By October the weather became brutally cold. She and her mother were sent to a forced labor metallurgic factory where they repaired items that had been damaged in the war. Her father was sent to a nearby city to work in the same type of factory. Both factories were supervised by Ukrainian troops who were collaborating with the Germans. Her father and the other men were so hungry that they ate grass. Severe dysentery resulted, and the 50 men were so sick that they couldn't work. All were taken to a mass grave and shot.

When the war ended Chaja and her mother went to a displaced person camp called Begovat in

Uzbekistan where they resided for two years. She met her husband, Pesach, and gave birth to a daughter there. The family made their way back to Poland, but received a frosty reception from the Poles, who could not believe any Jews had survived. While in Poland Chaja helped receive and register returning Jewish Polish citizens into the Zionist movement. In 1948, since they had no surviving family, Chaja, her husband and mother decided to go to Israel. They walked for days from Austria through the Alps to Genoa, Italy with her four-month old daughter. There they boarded a ship, Compidoglia, for Israel. Two days later they arrived in Yaffa, but the British refused to allow the refugees to disembark. They were smuggled off the ship in the middle of the night on little boats. The family initially lived in tents and had very little, but everyone was so grateful to be free in their homeland that they were ready to laugh and sing. Chaja was able to form the first Yiddish theatre in Israel in 1948. The company was so successful they eventually performed in London and South Africa. She later came to America to seek medical treatment for her daughter, who had a heart condition. Chaja's daughter survived open heart surgery at age 15, and is currently alive and well, living in the Bay Area. Her son lives in Israel.

Chaja attributes her survival to her determination and the fact that she always led an active life. She believes that women were the ones who saved their children's lives, and she is grateful to the many righteous gentiles who saved so many Jews.

Chaja believes the most important thing the Jewish people must do is preserve their heritage, their culture. Though she feels the religious aspects are important, she feels that their connection as a people is of primary importance.

Interviewed by:
Adam

Helena

Helena was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, on March 20, 1912. Both of her parents died when she was a child and relatives took care of her. Her Aunt Matilda enrolled her in the German Humanistic Gymnasium where she studied German, Czech, Latin and Greek. She studied English and French with private tutors.

Helena recalls a privileged childhood. She got "whatever her heart desired." She fondly recalls spending summer vacations at her grandmother's house, which was in a medieval Jewish ghetto surrounded by dense forests and lakes. Her grandmother introduced her to the wonders of nature, to the old synagogue and prayers.

Helena's family wanted her to become a pharmacist, but Helena preferred to become a physician, so she enrolled in the Czech University in Brno. She contracted septicemia from a corpse during her first year in medical school and had to drop her studies.

She was skiing in Austria when the Germans invaded. She had a premonition that Hitler wasn't likely to go away soon, so she made her way to Paris and attended business school. When the Germans invaded France in 1939 she traveled with a family to St. Jean de Luz in southwest France on the border with Spain. She became their governess and, in return, the mother taught her Spanish. Recognizing her talent as a teacher, the mother, who opened a school, hired her to tutor the students in German. Helena traveled ten miles each way on her bike because she needed the money and, although it was physically demanding, she loved the adventure.

One day she saw a posting in the public square ordering her and other Jews to report to German Military Headquarters. She recalled stories about people going in and not coming out, so she didn't go. She received four more notices and, finally, after nearly being arrested, appeared and registered as a Jew.

A former student who was a member of the French resistance asked Helena to help him gather intelligence about the German war effort. She pretended not to understand German, so officers at the beach spoke freely about military events, which she promptly fed to the underground. Information she provided led to the bombing of a bridge while German weapons were crossing it.

Her underground contact was eventually arrested and, the next day, so was Helena. She was interned in a military prison in Biarritz. Because she spoke fluent German, some soldiers were kind to her. Not everyone was so nice -- she was raped by the prison commander. That incident hardened her resolve not to allow the Nazis to break her spirit.

After her release from prison, the underground smuggled her over the Pyrenees and into Spain. On her way to San Sebastian, where she was to go to the British Consulate, Spanish soldiers, who demanded to see her passport, which she didn't have, stopped her. They let her proceed anyway. When she reached the home of friends of friends, they advised her not to attempt going to the consulate since Nazis and their sympathizers surrounded it. She became governess for the Argentine consul's daughter.

The Gestapo, who had General Franco's sympathy, apprehended Helena, found her Czech documents and turned her in to the Spanish police as an illegal alien. They planned to extradite her from Spain, but being in Spanish custody prevented that, saving her life. The prison was the most disgusting place she'd ever been. It was infested with rodents and lice. She was forced to share a cell with prostitutes. The Argentine consul contacted the British who helped obtain her release two months later.

She took four jobs to earn money. She became governess at the British consulate, served as a secretary at a Spanish importer of British mining machines, and as manager's assistant in the Palace Hotel, doing French correspondence. She also did Spanish correspondence for a lawyer.

After the war ended, Helena planned to go back home to Czechoslovakia. She was devastated to learn that her relatives had perished in Auschwitz. She had no reason to return and tried to immigrate to the US, but couldn't get a visa. She immigrated to Argentina where she met her husband, a British citizen, who brought her to America.

After her divorce, she moved to Palo Alto, where she worked first in the Stanford University student employment office, then at the Ford Foundation, where she retired at age 65. She continued to work at Stanford in other capacities until age 71. She takes pride in reminiscing that she initially didn't have the skills for any of the jobs she accepted, but was a quick learner on the job.

Interviewer's observations:
Throughout this interview Helena was reluctant to describe the most horrible details of her experiences under the Nazi regime. I was able to supplement what she told me with the information in a journal she shared with me. She doesn't consider herself a Holocaust survivor, because she was never in a concentration camp. The Holocaust Survivor Group considers every Jew who lived under Nazi occupation, experiencing inhumane treatment and unimaginable horror that words cannot describe, a Survivor.

Interviewed by:
Marni

Lore

Lore was born on March 21, 1924 in Hagen, Germany to a wealthy family of non-observant Jews who were well known in their town. A chauffeur drove her to school everyday, and her family felt very secure in Germany.

That feeling of well being soon changed. In 1938, at age 14 Lore was expelled from school. Later that year, on Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, one of her father's friends saved her family from the violence that surrounded them. Even though the people of her town were afraid to look at Jews, they brought food to her family. The Nazis cruelly took away the dog she had owned since the age of six. Sometime between 1940 and 1941 Lore's family was forced to leave their home, but her father's status as a veteran of World War I offered them a little protection.

Then at age 18, in 1942, Lore and her family were ordered to report for deportation to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. They were taken to a hall, where they sat for two or three days. Then they walked in the July heat, wearing several layers of clothes, to the train station where they were loaded onto a cattle car. The Jews were densely packed in these cars, and there was no space for anyone to sleep. When they arrived at the camp they were forced to march for two hours, and then were split up and sent to different buildings.

Theresienstadt was Lore's home for the next three wretched years. It was not a death camp, but rather served as a transit point from which Jews were sent to the gas chambers at other camps. Lore witnessed many people being deported from Theresienstadt, but since she and her family had high numbers, they always managed to escape that fate.
The Jews were housed in buildings that were originally designed to be forts, and the conditions were poor. Lore vividly recalls the dirt floors that were covered with straw and the bug infested beds. She was able to stay with her mother, but her father was sent to

another building. A thin, watery soup made from potato peals provided most of their daily nourishment. Lore recalls the special pleasure she felt when she received a quarter loaf of bread on her birthday from a friend in the kitchen. Many inmates became ill from the combination of malnutrition and unsanitary living conditions. Lore's mother contracted typhus. When Lore ran a high fever a famous Jewish surgeon at the camp removed her tonsils. It is hard to imagine, but he operated with a kitchen knife and no anesthesia.

The inmates at Theresienstadt worked hard. Many spent their days splitting stones in the barracks. At the end of the day the Nazis weighed the split rock, and anyone who did not fill his or her quota was "taken away." Lore's father worked spraying Nazi uniforms white to disguise them, and carrying dead bodies to the crematorium. He befriended an artist who used to steal potato sacks at night to use as canvasses for his paintings. Before that man was deported to Auschwitz he left those paintings with Lore's father for safekeeping. The man never returned, and those paintings now hang on her living room wall.

Once Lore's father got a note to report for deportation. When Lore arrived at her work site she bravely begged an S. S. guard named Ullrich for permission to be transported with her father. The guard questioned why she would want to go, and recorded her father's number. Moments before the cattle car was due to leave Theresienstadt, her father was called off the train and allowed to return to the camp. Lore will never forget this one guard's act of humanity that stood in such stark contrast to the brutality that she witnessed and endured daily.

The Nazis presented Theresienstadt to the world as a model camp. In preparation for a visit by the Red Cross, Lore and the other inmates were forced to build a coffee house and pave sidewalks. The Nazis gave the Jews new clothes to wear, and made everyone rehearse their parts. When the Red Cross came, they saw inmates sitting at the coffee house, and children playing soccer in the field. The Nazis put on a convincing show.
In 1945, the Russians liberated the camp and the Germans fled. But life was still not safe. The Russians raped many girls, including one of Lore's friends. Lore feels grateful that she was spared.

After liberation, Lore Lane's hometown sent a car to bring her family home. But she and her parents did not want to return to Hagen, so they stayed at the displaced persons camp. (She found out later that her old neighbors had saved her family's possessions for them.) While they were at the displaced persons camp, the Russians took some of the girls to a dance. Because they were so hungry, Lore and the others ate too much ice cream and got very sick. During the year they spent at the camp they were taught English. They couldn't come to the United States right away because they didn't have a sponsor. The American Consulate was also reluctant to give the family permission to immigrate because Lore's father was very sick. But after Lore's mother begged, the family received permission. Her father agreed to change the family name to Lane. They had to borrow $180 for the passage, which they paid back later.

In 1946 the Lanes moved to New York. The three of them lived in one room with kitchen privileges until they were able to move to a furnished apartment. Lore met her husband in 1949 and got married the following year in July. They had two daughters, but sadly her husband died as a young man. She got a job at the census bureau and worked there for 25 years, eventually becoming a supervisor. She lived in New York for 50 years, before moving to California with her daughter's family.

Lore feels that her strong will to live, and her belief in God's protection, helped her survive. She doesn't hate the Germans, because she feels that this hate would only consume her and harm her. She has made peace with everything.

Interviewed by:
Liuba

Solomon

Solomon was born in 1938 in the suburbs of Warsaw. He was four and a half years old when his family and he found themselves running through the streets of Warsaw trying to find a hiding place to stay alive for just one more day. The traumatic events that occurred during Sol's first years in this world left such an impact that he vividly remembers everything from about age three.

When the Nazi murderers first invaded Warsaw, Sol and his family fled to a smaller town. On the way there, a Nazi warplane began to strafe his family's convoy. Realizing that the reflection of Sol's chrome-plated baby carriage was the reason for this, his mother covered the carriage and Sol with her body. Seeing this, the Nazi miraculously decided not to finish his strafing.

Once the occupation was complete, the family returned to Warsaw. Although technically his family house and mill were placed within the Warsaw Ghetto border, it was separated by a few fields and was only placed within the Ghetto for administrative purposes. A few days afterwards the SS came and took his grandfather to jail. Sol and his mother went to give his grandfather his Talit, a prayer shawl, and this was the last time that Sol was to see his grandfather. This was also the only time that Sol was to witness a miniscule evidence of humanity, which the Nazis, in general, lacked. When he went to give his grandfather his Talit, a Nazi guard pointed his gun "to shoot me. My mother, with tears in her eyes, begged the guard not to kill me, and he relented in one small measure of humanity."

Once the family saw the Nazis clearing buildings in the ghetto and, inconceivable as this sounds, throwing children off the roofs of the buildings to their deaths, they decided to leave at once. They contacted their savior Felix Cywinski through his mother's friend. Sol describes Felix Cywinski as having the same personality as that of Oskar Schindler seen in Steven Spielberg's movie "Schindler's List." For two years Sol, his father, and his mother lived in a section of Cywinski's house that was located upstairs and covered by a trap door

hidden inside a false brick wall, which was erected by Sol's father. To further complicate the situation, Cywinski's house was located adjacent to the main Nazi army camp in the Warsaw area. But the family was hidden so well that the children of the house did not even know they were there. In those two years, Sol was only outside once, at night, and even that was extremely dangerous.

One early day in 1945, Sol looked out of the window that his parents forbade him to go near. Outside he saw "a small green tank with a large red star gingerly moving through the orchard, beyond the deserted army camp." Sol recounted that no one could believe this. "The Nazis had us so intimated and convinced of their supremacy and invincibility; their imminent defeat was too great a mental leap for the adults to make."

After the war, Sol and his family remained in Warsaw for a while, and then moved to other parts of Poland. Unable to stand living in that country because of its horrendous history, Sol and his family moved to Israel. After a decade or so, Sol received a scholarship to get educated in America, where he brought his parents and met his wife. He has lived here ever since.

He remains very much attached to Israel and in contact with friends who continue to live there. Along with a copy of a memoir that he wrote, Sol met me with an article from the San Jose Mercury News of that morning, dated 4/2/03. The title was: "War Revives a Jewish Dilemma: Are They Assimilated – or Kidding Themselves?" This article noted that even though anti-Islamic hate crimes are on the rise in this country, they still number less than half of the anti-Jewish hate crimes perpetrated here. Sol brought this to me to show that the Jewish struggle is far from over. That is one reason why he gives talks to anyone, from college professors to high school students.

Interviewed by:
Tommy

Jack

Jack was born on December 13, 1928 in Lodz Poland, a city of 600,000 residents, half of whom were Jews. He was an only child but he spent a lot of time with his uncle who was only six weeks older than he. Jack grew up on a Jewish street in the non-Jewish part of the city. Because they lived in a Jewish enclave surrounded by gentiles, the residents of the street treated each other as extended family. Every Shabbat his grandparents visited, and his grandfather would tell him stories of his life and how he dealt with the hardships he faced. The enduring lesson his grandfather taught him was, "the most important thing is to help your neighbor." Jack also had many friends in the non-Jewish community.

During the first week of September in 1939, Jack was introduced to the airplane… about 200 of them. The Nazis invaded Poland one week later. Few people, including his own family, understood Hitler's political and military intentions. Three months after the occupation, the Nazis forced all 300,000 Jews to move into a three-acre area of the Jewish quarter that became known as the Lodz Ghetto. Eventually Jews from all over Europe were sent there en route to Auschwitz. One of the leaders of the Jewish community tried to negotiate with the Nazis so that the Jews could work for food, in an effort to forestall the deportations. Despite these efforts, thousands were deported regularly. Jack was put to work sewing pants. He managed to survive in the Lodz ghetto until 1944.

That year, the Nazis deported Jack and his father to what he thought would be Germany but turned out to be Auschwitz. After being inspected, (or rather, molested, as Jack recalls), he and his father, along with 1000 others, were sent to work for the Continental Rubber Company in Aalm, Germany, directly outside of Hanover. After three months the Allies began bombing Hanover and destroyed the factory. The Jewish inmates were forced to rebuild the factory in the middle of winter. Jack's father suffered from malnutrition, and when he wasn't able to work anymore the SS murdered him with a shot of gasoline (although Jack did not find this out until much later).

In April 1945 the Nazis forced Jack to dig his own grave, and he was sure he would not

survive. But miraculously, the Nazis simply disappeared. The next day the Red Cross entered the camp and, with the best of intentions, fed canned ham to the starving Jewish inmates they found. Unfortunately the Jews were not used to such a high fat content and many subsequently died. Then American troops, coming straight from the Battle of the Bulge, entered the camp with a Jewish chaplain who told the inmates they were free.

The Americans sent Jack to a little hospital in Hanover where he recuperated for six weeks and got plenty of nourishment.

He eventually decided to return to Poland to find his mother. On the way to the train station a Russian officer asked him to join the Russian army. Jack refused and fled to the next town so that he could catch the train to Lodz. The first Polish words he heard were, "the only good Hitler did was cleanse Poland of the Jews."

After finding his mother, Jack returned to Germany where he met his wife. She and her mother both wanted to go to America, but Jack, through his connections with the army was able to cross the Atlantic first. He lived in New York for a while and quickly joined the army. The army nearly sent him to Alaska, but he persuaded them to post him to Germany. At the same time, his wife was granted permission to join Jack in New York, so he never actually went to Germany.

Jack began his career by fixing the army's office equipment and working as a taxi driver. After six months he opened up his own typewriter store in New York. He focused primarily on repair work until he got enough money to buy a factory in Germany. He then moved onto the calculator business and relocated to Toronto for a while. Eventually he moved to California. Jack and his wife have three sons and five grandchildren.

Interviewed by:
Jacob

Back Cover Holocaust Remembrance Inspired Art

Created by "Generation to Generation" Class, Congregation Beth David Hebrew High School. These students also performed the interviews of those Survivors not comfortable writing their own accounts.

"The legacy of the survivors of the Holocaust must live on through the voices of others in order that this chapter in our history is never forgotten and never allowed to take place again."

— Rebecca Cohn
Assemblymember, 24th District

"Dazzling Yellow" by Lisa

"The Forest" by Liuba

"Broken Chain" by Marni

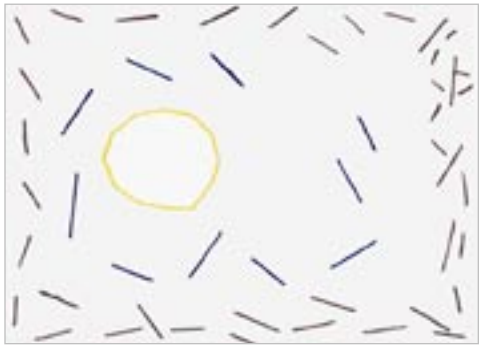
"Life on Either Side of the Barbed Wire" by Micheele

"Candle Lit Night" by Ronny

"Obscure Stars" by Adam

Untitled by Tamara

"Destination Unknown" by Andrew



Untitled by Leah